

Directorate of Neurosciences

Facet Joint Injection

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about facet joint injections and aims to answer any questions you may have. If you have any further questions, please ask a member of staff. Contact telephone numbers are provided at the end of this information leaflet.

Why do I need this injection?

You have pain in the back, leg or arm possibly caused by wear and tear in the facet joints in the spine. Injecting the facet joint can help relieve the pain.

What is the aim of the treatment?

The aim of a facet joint injection is to give local anaesthetic and a long acting steroid close to the nerve root as it leaves the spine. This produces an anti-inflammatory effect and can relieve the arm or leg pain.

Facet joint injections can be used in two ways: -

1. As a diagnostic tool to confirm whether the facet joint is the cause of the limb pain.
2. As a treatment for the pain repeated as necessary.

How long will the pain relief last for?

Pain relief varies for each individual. Your pain may

- be relieved completely and not return
- be reduced for several weeks and then return, but is not as bad
- be reduced for several weeks but return as bad as it was.

About your appointment

- The procedure is done as a **DAY CASE**.
- You must have someone who is able to **accompany you** and stay with you during your appointment, otherwise it maybe cancelled.
- You could be in the hospital up to 3 hours.
- You should **not** drive for 24 hours following the injection. You should **not** use public transport therefore please arrange an alternative mode of transport You can eat and drink as normal before the procedure.
- You should take your usual medications, however if you are prescribed **Warfarin** or **Dabigatran**, you must telephone 0191 282 5413 before the appointment date.
- If you are diabetic, you **do not** need to let us know in advance.

Do I need to contact the hospital about my appointment?

Once you have received your appointment letter, please telephone us on 0191 282 5413 if you need to change your appointment or if you have any further questions or concerns.

What happens when I arrive at the hospital?

- Please report to Ward 17 which is situated on level 5 of the New Victoria Wing, Royal Victoria Infirmary.
- Please wear loose clothing or if you prefer we will provide a hospital gown.

- The radiologist will explain the procedure to you, answer your questions and ask you to sign a consent form. A pen mark will be made on the area to be injected

How is the injection performed?

- You will be asked to lie face down on the x-ray couch, whilst the area to be injected is cleaned with antiseptic solution.
- The skin is numbed with some local anaesthetic - this stings a little at first.
- Using x-ray guidance, a fine needle is inserted into the exit hole of the nerve root suspected to be the cause of the pain. A small amount of local anaesthetic and the long acting steroid (depot steroid triamcinolone) is then injected around the nerve root.

What happens after the injection?

- Following the injection, you will be asked to sit on the side of the x-ray couch and then to stand. You will then return to the ward and **shortly after you should be able to go home.**
- You may notice that your leg or arm feels slightly warm and numb for a few hours afterwards.
- You will be given a pain chart to complete at home. The radiology nurse will explain it to you. We will ask you to send a completed copy to the referring consultant in a pre paid envelope.

Pain relief may occur in the following ways: -

- Immediate relief.
- Pain relief starting within 12 – 24 hours.
- No change for several days and then a slow improvement over several weeks.

What are the side effects of the treatment?

There may be a temporary numbness in the arm or leg. This usually wears off in a few hours.

What are the risks and complications of the treatment?

- Soreness or bruising where the injection was given. This usually settles in a few days.
- Infection - Infection risks are minimised by performing the procedure under sterile conditions.
- No pain relief - the commonest complication would be that the treatment did not help the pain in the arm or leg.
- Like all x-ray machines the one used during the facet joint injection produces x-rays. Modern equipment is designed to keep the dose to patients as low as possible. Your referring consultant will have decided that the benefit of having the facet joint injection is greater than the risk of the small dose of radiation. However, if you think you may be pregnant it is very important that you tell the radiographer **before** the procedure.

How do I get my results?

The consultant who referred you for the procedure will arrange for you to have an outpatient appointment to review the results

Who do I contact if I have any problems?

Between the hours of 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday please contact:

For queries about your appointment or to confirm you are coming by ambulance contact the Neuroradiology Secretaries on 0191 282 5413

For queries relating to your day case procedure please contact ward 17 on 0191 282 6017

Outside these times, please contact your GP.

This leaflet is available in alternative formats on request by telephoning
0191 2825413 (Monday—Friday 8.45am—5pm)

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